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WAR CHIEFS

624 Although the Comanche did not attain such a clear differentiation of function and status of the war chiefs as was the case in the more advanced plains tribes, yet the influence of those tribes upon Comanche life is marked in the complex of patterns pertaining to Comanche war chiefs. The study of the Comanche was made too late to learn all one would like to know about the way of the Comanche war bonnet wearer. The information of present day Indians on this point is often vague and confusing. The use of specific [184] types of war bonnets was not a cultural universal throughout the Comanche tribe. There are indications of notable band differences.

624 The wearer of the full-feathered war bonnet was a person of special sta-
● 565 tus in the tribe. Although not organized into an association, the wearers of the full-feathered war bonnet formed a special class. They were known individually as tɛ́kniwʌp.* A man joined the tɛ́kniwʌp class and was privileged to wear the bonnet by accumulation of sufficient coups, by bestowal of the bonnet as a challenge by the women, or by recovering a bonnet discarded by its owner in flight. These methods will be described.

624 The first road to war chief status is best described in the tale recorded from That's It. (Quotation marks in this and subsequent cases indicate actual transcription of informant's statement.)

Case 1. The Making of a War Chief
Informant: That's It

"The youngest brother wanted to go to war. He was a strong young man, maybe sixteen years old. It was time, he thought, to show his worth to the people.

"He went to his father, telling him of the feeling he had, saying that he wanted to go with the fighters on the raid. His father was glad that his son had such thoughts. 'It is good,' he said. 'And furthermore, my son, I will give you a powerful pony with which to meet our enemies. You shall have a good mule to ride upon the trail, for you must respect your pony. He must be ridden only in battle. Ride upon the mule and lead the pony by its halter until the proper time. When you get to the territory of our enemies it will be time. Leave your mule and get on that pony. Ride [789] him hard like you were meeting the enemy. Do this a short way and stop. Rest! Charge again. Rest once more. Do this four times, my son. Do this, and you will have a pony which will never tire. It will be a famous war pony among the people.'

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[197] * The word tɛ́kniwʌp, which in Comanche has come to mean "war leader," is derived from the Shoshone term for peace chief, tɛ́gwɔni. Literally translated in Shoshone this means, "good talk thrown out to the people." The Shoshonean war chief is called naǥedink tɛ́gwɔni, "in war, good talk thrown out to the people." The Comanche peace chief term, pʌrʌiǥo, it will be remembered, has no generic meaning in the Comanche language.

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522 575 887 heads of the forebearing elders. Indeed, boys will be boys. And peace-making may on occasion father trouble.

575 887 182 One is forced to wonder if youth would have dared such action before the days of white contact. Was this a sign of cultural disintegration? One suspects so. One cannot give a definite answer, but against the generous indulgence always shown to boys by the Comanche elders, there is to be put the fact that the Smoke Lodge was one of the first Comanche practices to go after white contact. Old men died off. The rising generation did not carry on the practice. The effrontery of the boys may have been a sign of its weakening hold. And in any going culture one may expect the normal human reaction: that what on one occasion may be a joke, an escapade, or a licensed blowing off of steam, will on sufficient repetition become a nuisance or an outrage and be dealt with as such.

565 In this survey of associations we have observed that the division of Comanche society into compartmental groupings had not gone very far. Age classes were lacking. The old men in the Comanche Smoke Lodge formed a sort of Council of Elders, but they were not taken too seriously, nor their opinions held to be law. Military groupings were too embryonic to have left their mark; medicine societies were largely lacking in demonstrated legal significance. Where groups did enter into the legal complex we shall see that they were formed about the kinship and friendship bond.